



*Comfort and Joy:
Locating Hope in Dress
and the Body*

Dress & Body Association
annual conference

November 1-2, 2025

Our Mission Statement

“Dress” is a highly inclusive concept that includes all varieties of body supplements and body modifications* found in human cultures around the world. It is not limited to clothing, costume, or fashion or to any particular time, place, or economic structure. The mission of the Dress and Body Association (DBA) is to bring together scholars from diverse disciplines and areas of the world to share academic research about dress and body practices understood broadly, to offer quality opportunities for networking, and to forge links with like-minded individuals and organizations.

The Dress and Body Association is based entirely online, an essential structure for

- 1.Flexibility: In-person conferences are cumbersome and expensive to plan, which makes them difficult to change or adapt to new circumstances.
- 2.Accessibility: Travel is expensive and time-consuming. Many scholars cannot afford to travel. Even scholars with funding may have restrictions due to caretaking responsibilities, health issues, difficulty obtaining a visa, etc.
- 3.Inclusivity: ‘Dress and the body’ is a subject that pertains to all human cultures; the DBA is committed to including scholars from diverse disciplines and areas of the world.
- 4.Sustainability: International travel is not only expensive, but harmful to the planet. Online activities reduce consumption and waste.

*Joanne B. Eicher (2000), “Dress,” *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women’s Issues and Knowledge*, edited by Cheris Kramarae and Dale Spender, New York, Routledge: 422-423.

The Dress and Body Association is registered as a non-profit organization (501(c)(3)) in the state of Indiana (United States). Donations are tax-deductible.



2025 Dress and Body Association Conference

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Dress and Body Association invites submissions for the organization's sixth annual conference, **which will be held on November 1-2, 2025**. Consistent with our long-term goals for inclusivity and sustainability, all activities will be 100% online.

Join our Google Group to learn about opportunities and converse with members of the DBA year-round! Email to request membership: dress.body.assoc@gmail.com.

Comfort and Joy: Locating Hope in Dress and the Body

Given the number of wars, genocides, and authoritarian movements happening worldwide, 2025 is shaping up to be a historically challenging year. Nevertheless, dress and the body have long been sites where people find real pleasure, meaning, and hopefulness.

Proposals on any topic related to dress and the body will be considered, but abstracts related to this year's theme are most likely to be accepted. Topics might include:

- The role of dress in cultural survival and revival
- Embodied experiences with positive psychology
- Claiming and reclaiming comfort in disabled bodies
- "Black boy joy" (defying appearance-based stereotypes)
- The deep satisfactions of place-specific dress practices (i.e. indigenous)
- Taking up space and reclaiming privacy through dress
- Tattoos as permanence in an impermanent world
- Reclaiming the joys of being a student, scholar, educator, etc.
- LGBTQ+ strategies for surviving and thriving
- Performing resistance through costuming and cosplay
- Inspiring hope and personal reflection through wearable art
- Fashion outside of the corporate and/or capitalist sphere

Both beginning and advanced scholars are welcome. Abstracts should be 200-300 words. Presenters do not need to submit a paper before the conference. Depending on the number of submissions and the time zones of presenters, each person should have approximately 20 minutes to speak with additional time for discussion.

Although we welcome scholars, educators, artists, designers, and activists from any country, the language of the conference will be English. We will consider a group of presentations in another language if there is sufficient interest.

Abstracts must be written in English and should be drawn from your own, original work. We ask that presenters not simply recycle presentations from classes or other conferences. Pre-recorded presentations are allowed, but presenters must join the Zoom meeting to hear other speakers and participate in the discussion in real time.

Please submit your abstract by July 1, 2025. All submissions will be read by at least two reviewers in a single-blind review process. If there is no extension on the deadline, authors can expect letters of acceptance by mid-August. (Given the challenging times we are living in, please be patient with any delays... we are doing our best.)

To submit an abstract, go to this link: <https://forms.gle/uoz3ohs9bG21pQDFA>

Curious about past conferences? Check out our programs for 2020-2024 on Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/@dress_and_body_association.

Whether you choose to submit an abstract or not, you're welcome to attend the conference! There is no charge. Just email us (dress.body.assoc@gmail.com) to join our Google Group and stay informed.

The Dress and Body Association is registered as a non-profit organization (501(c)(3)) in the state of Indiana (United States).

Dress & Body Association | dress.body.assoc@gmail.com

Welcome!

We are thrilled to have you join us for the DBA's sixth annual conference. In these uncertain times, it is truly a "comfort and joy" to spend a little time hearing about the work of talented scholars, educators, artists, designers, and activists who care about the past, present, and future of dress and the body.



Co-Directors of the DBA, Heather Akou and Stefan (Steve) Rabitsch
in Cape May, New Jersey (US), May 2024

Important information

Our schedule is based on GMT, but some participants will have to adjust for changes due to daylight savings:

Nov. 1st	Locations	Nov. 2nd
GMT -6	Alberta	GMT -7
GMT -5	US (CST), Manitoba	GMT -6
GMT -4	US (EST), Ontario	GMT -5
GMT -2.5	Newfoundland	GMT -2.5
GMT 0	UK	GMT 0
GMT 0	Nigeria	GMT +1
GMT +1	Netherlands, Denmark	GMT +1
GMT +1	Croatia, Italy, Poland	GMT +1
GMT +5	Uzbekistan	GMT +5
GMT +4.5	India	GMT +5.5
GMT +8	Beijing	GMT +8
GMT +11	New South Wales	GMT +11

I have included the home time for each presenter on the abstract page, but please double check your times!

Zoom links

In email from dress.body.assoc@gmail.com
Links for Day 1 and Day 2 plus back-up links

Schedule of activities

Live from the United States, starting Saturday, November 1st

12:45 GMT	Welcome, troubleshooting
13:00-15:00	Group 1: Brittney Miles, Marissa Guijarro, Brittany Thorpe, Mario Valori
15:00-17:00	Group 2: JD Davids, Karla Lebhaft, Maja Wandasiewicz
17:00-19:00	Group 3: Payton Becker, Lisa Poirier, A. Korkor Ebeheakey
19:00-21:00	Group 4: Caroline Lieffers, Jane Nicholas, Blessing Adedokun-Awojodu and Shoshannah Ganz
21:00-23:00	Group 5: Grace McCleskey, Dylan Joachim, and Kelsey Scholes

Live from Norway, starting Sunday, November 2nd

8:45 GMT	Welcome, troubleshooting
9:00-11:00	Group 6: Katarzyna Kociolek, Amala Vinod and Arindam Das, Alisa Barannikova, Marta Bianco
11:00-13:00	Group 7: Galina Ignatenko, Arathi Anil, Debasree Sarkar
13:00-15:00	Group 8: Adaku Agnes Ubelejit-Nte, Hemasoundari Rajadurai, Ishan Tripathi
15:00-17:00	Group 9: Kadian A. Gosler, Jenny Frances Mearns, Jalen Thompson
17:00-19:00	Group 10: Ibtisam Ahmed, Kim Renfrew, Perrin Marie, Tarisa Little

Abstracts (in order of speakers)

Brittney Miles

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

drbrittneymiles@gmail.com

13:00 GMT / 8:00 in the United States (EST)

Refusing Beauty Erasure: Black Women's Accounts of Aesthetic Excess and Audacious Beauty as Collective Affirmation

Black women's embodiment is deeply shaped by hegemonic white and Western beauty discourse that has historically misrepresented and excluded them. Using data from over 60 interviews (open-ended and photo elicitation) with Black women in the United States from ages 19-55 about beauty and embodiment, I explore how they resist beauty erasure to affirm themselves. This project operationalizes both the concepts of aesthetic excess and ontological beauty. Jillian Hernandez's framing of Black and Latina women's aesthetic excess as a racialized embodiment and cultural capital situates the tensions between erasure and hypervisibility. My concept of ontological beauty elevates the importance of the experiences of a given people and their shared history in our social understanding of how beauty is defined, understood, and performed. Black women's audacious refusal to be excluded from dominant conceptions of beauty, while also constructing their own beauty logics grounded in their distinct racial and cultural backgrounds is the unification of the two aforementioned concepts. The data captures the ways Black women deploy particular beauty strategies and discursive maneuvers to unapologetically take up space as empowerment. The quotes and participant-submitted photo in this presentation evidence how in the time of immense state-sanctioned violence and the systematic disappearance and erasure of hypermarginalized people, Black women's embodied labors are a demonstration of resistance, agency, and possibility.

Marissa Guijarro
CUNY Graduate Center

nymarissag@gmail.com

13:00 GMT / 8:00 in the United States (EST)

Fashion Redlining

Fashion Redlining: This presentation will show how the domination of straight sizes (0-4) on fashion runways reflects a historical and systemic anti-black bias in the fashion industry and will compare this bias to other racist practices. Using an interdisciplinary approach, my research compares systemic bias in the fashion industry, which I call “fashion redlining”, with de jure housing discrimination in the United States. This examination exposes the fallacies of the cult of thinness, which denies the existence of the average-sized woman in the United States and supports endemic discriminatory practices in fashion curricula, design, and production. The result of such practices illustrates how various forms of racial capitalism profit from the binary of white vs. black and thin vs. fat prevalent in post-colonial cultures. The research draws from philosophy, history, women’s studies, primary sources - including a revealing document from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, trade journals, and interviews with fashion industry professionals. The resulting analysis supports the premise that fashion redlining is pernicious and similar to housing discrimination and highlights how the Black body continues to be segregated, denied, and erased in two seemingly disparate industries. In conclusion, this presentation reveals the similarities between fashion redlining and housing discrimination to facilitate the disruption of oppressive white paternalistic bias and the dismantling of structural racist, misogynist, and fatphobic practices. Ultimately, the goal is to overcome exclusionary and transactional histories by desegregating fashion spaces to include and celebrate people of every body size.



Brittany Thorpe

Independent Scholar/Educator

brittanyethorpe@gmail.com

13:00 GMT / 14:00 in the Netherlands

Prototyping Discomfort, Prioritising Bodily Joy: Lessons for Fashion Education from Wider Design Disciplines

This presentation explores the challenges and potentials of introducing neurodivergent-centered co-design practices into educational settings. Drawing from two workshops held at different institutions, it reflects on how students engage with embodied, experimental prototyping to inform design and iterative making processes. Two workshops, held at Willem de Kooning Academie, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, and Falmouth University, United Kingdom, explored rapid prototyping as a way to initiate the design process through making. Informed by previous workshops with neurodivergent participants using similar formats, these sessions aimed to help students consider how including the moving, reactive body early in the design process can support more inclusive outcomes. Workshop 1 included BA students across various art and design disciplines; Workshop 2 included BA Fashion Design students. This contrast highlighted differing approaches to prototyping and the role of the body in design research. This analysis frames the workshops as case studies in process: sites where uncertainty, hesitation, and participation create opportunities for insight into educational norms, expectations, and approaches. What emerges is a call to consider what fashion design education can learn from broader art and design pedagogies—the joy of mixing methods, learning across disciplines, and returning to the body as a site of knowing. These reflections advocate for pedagogical approaches that prioritize care, sensory awareness, and the joy of imperfection.



Mario Valori

qt-2

hi@mariovalori.it

13:00 GMT / 14:00 in Italy

Dollhouse Rules: Fashion's Affective Economy in Infinity Nikki

Fashion has never been merely about fabric and form—it's a language of power, identity, and belonging that speaks across cultures and centuries. In our digital age, this language finds perhaps its most compelling expression in *Infinity Nikki*, the gaming phenomenon that captivated over 20 million players within its first week of release in late 2024. With critical acclaim from major gaming outlets and \$16 million in opening-month revenue, the game has established itself as more than entertainment—it's a cultural laboratory where the politics of dress play out in virtual space. Set in the fantastical realm of Miraland, *Infinity Nikki* transforms fashion from ornament into agency. Players guide Nikki through adventures where every narrative beat flows through the act of dressing. Clothing choices don't simply reflect character—they constitute it, determining what paths open, what stories unfold. The game reimagines fashion as fundamental infrastructure, not decorative afterthought. The allure runs deeper than mechanics, tapping into what we might call the affective economy of digital dress. *Infinity Nikki* offers players a fantasy of pure aesthetic pleasure—collecting, styling, and curating without material constraints. Virtual garments become “clothes but not clothes,” retaining dress's symbolic power while shedding its physical limitations. Players inhabit a space of endless possibility, where identity can be tried on, discarded, and reconstructed with each outfit change. Yet this digital Eden comes with its own serpents. The game's aesthetic universe operates within tightly circumscribed boundaries. East Asian and mainstream Western design sensibilities dominate, relegating other cultural expressions to exotic footnotes rather than integral voices. More insidious still is the game's algorithmic architecture of taste. *Infinity Nikki*'s tagging and scoring systems don't merely catalogue fashion—they encode it, transforming aesthetic judgement into computational logic. Players learn to dress not for personal expression but for algorithmic approval, their creativity channelled through predefined categories. What masquerades as freedom becomes sophisticated aesthetic discipline. The game's approach to the body reveals another regulatory layer. *Infinity Nikki* maintains strict visual chasteness—undergarments mark the boundary of the permissible, while anything suggesting adult sexuality remains absent. Nikki emerges not as a complex embodied subject but as a collectible doll, her body sanitised into “cute” harmlessness. This isn't innocent design but active censorship, shaped by platform policies and cultural discomfort with female bodies and desires. *Infinity Nikki* thus presents a paradox: a space promising limitless self-expression while systematically constraining its possibilities. This proposal will trace how the game, despite offering genuine pleasures and new forms of digital embodiment, ultimately exposes fashion's continued role as a site of cultural hegemony and disciplinary power. Even in virtual spaces, dress remains a battlefield where questions of identity and belonging are fought.



JD Davids

CUNY Graduate Center

jdavids@gradcenter.cuny.edu

15:00 GMT / 11:00 in the US (EST)

Packing Red, Packing Blue: Transmasculine Outfits, Equipment and Practices in Cruising for Public Outdoor Sex

In Samuel R. Delaney's 1999 book, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, the author – a Black gay science fiction writer – weaves stories from his many experiences of sex and socializing in Manhattan porn theaters to reveal these stigmatized settings, then targeted for elimination by political and business leaders, as spaces facilitating authentic, and at times sustained, cross-class/cross-cultural affinity and alliances between men. As a disabled and chronically ill white transmasculine researcher, memoirist and public health activist, I seek to pay homage to Delaney's groundbreaking work in a growing set of oral histories and participant-selected photographs of trans male and non-binary people's embodied choices for engaging in cruising and public sex – with cisgender men and with each other – in this moment of overt political and public hostility against transgender lives and identities. In this hybrid initiative, I also document my own practices, in a comic book tale of explicit urban seaside encounters offering a meditation on fragility and resistance, pleasure and loss, and bodies and gender at the tumultuous quarter mark of the 21st century. As a body of work, this research/memoir effort demonstrates how transgender/non-binary people utilize clothing (including partial or full nudity); body modifiers and sex equipment such as chest binders and harnesses, jock straps, and packers/strapped-on phalluses; and physical signifiers including glances, touch and auditory cues to seek out and obtain sexual connections across boundaries of gender, race, class and sexuality that express physical, emotional and spiritual desire, power and joy. This cross-methods research and artistic practice thus offers a compellingly broad and complex spectrum of body autonomy, self-expression, pleasure and connection in and across transgender/non-binary lives, extending from and expanding longstanding traditions of feminist, gay male and public sex cultures resisting repression and erasure.



Karla Lebhaft
University of Zagreb

karlalebhaft@gmail.com
15:00 GMT / 16:00 in Croatia

Marked by Refusal: Ignorant Style Tattooing and the Subversive Aesthetics of the Everyday

This paper explores the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of the "ignorant style" of tattooing, a deliberately rough, naive, and anti-aesthetic approach that has emerged from the margins of contemporary visual culture. Often characterized by crude lines, disproportions, and ironic or absurd motifs, ignorant tattoos bear the visible imprint of criminal tattoo traditions, street art, graffiti, and DIY subcultures. As such, they resist the polished virtuosity and commercial appeal typical of mainstream tattooing. Rather than dismissing these practices as juvenile or unserious, I examine how they function as embodied forms of critique—rejecting normative standards of beauty, permanence, and legibility. For many wearers, ignorant tattoos offer a means to reclaim their bodies through imperfection, failure, and absurdity. In this sense, they provide a strange and often irreverent joy: a way of subverting dominant visual regimes while asserting agency in the most personal of spaces—the skin. Through visual analysis and ethnographic observation, this paper situates ignorant style tattooing within broader frameworks of resistance, self-inscription, and everyday aesthetics. It considers how bodies marked by this style defy legibility and refuse to perform according to social expectations, thereby carving out space for nonconformity, vulnerability, and alternative forms of comfort.



Maja Wandasiewicz
Independent Researcher

maja.wandasiewicz@gmail.com
15:00 GMT / 16:00 in Poland

The Category is: Dance or Die. Survival Tactics of Camp and Abjection in the Aesthetics of Lady Gaga's Mayhem (2025)

The paper focuses on the aesthetics of Lady Gaga's most recent album Mayhem (2025) – namely, the music videos of its main singles and the promotional performances on Saturday Night Live, at Coachella, and in Rio de Janeiro. It argues that through Gaga's usual reclamation of elements which are considered abject and uncanny – both in the representation of her body and the fashion pieces she is donning – and through their subsequent "camping," she is making a statement of power and resilience in the face of today's political climate in the Western countries, in which the rights of marginalised groups are being actively eroded. Through the lens of gender studies, with a particular focus on the various ways of carving out feminist and queer subjectivities – as stated in, for example, writings of Julia Kristeva, Barbara Creed, and Susan Sontag – it focuses on a peculiar relationship between theatre, ballroom culture, pop music, and politics. It recognises Lady Gaga as the antagonist of the conservative culture and "faux" choice feminism of the 21st century, perfectly represented by Katty Perry's 2024 single "Woman's World." Finally, it raises the question of whether, despite the overwhelming feeling of malaise experienced by the members of the marginalised groups, our final choice truly is to dance or die.



Payton Becker
Penn State University

peb5238@psu.edu
17:00 GMT / 13:00 in the US (EST)

Comfort through Costume: Reclaiming Indigenous Dress at the Carlisle Indian School

In the late 19th century, the Carlisle Indian School aimed to assimilate Indigenous youth to American society. As an integral part of identity formation and maintenance, dress became a tool to reshape Indigenous bodies and minds into a settler ideal. The school prioritized this transformation, making it the first step of a student's assimilation to American culture. In stripping away the clothes of their Indigenous lifestyle, the boarding school both initiated an internal identity change and attempted to create an external indication of conversion. For outsiders, it indicated an engagement in the assimilation process, which is why General Pratt's 'Before' and 'After' photos of students in 'Indian' costume then 'American' dress were effective in marketing the school's success. But there are Indigenous experiences and perspectives that these neat, progress-oriented 'Before' and 'After' photos don't capture. Many students expressed reluctance to undergo these dress transformations, citing both the physical discomfort of the garments on the body and the repression of Indigenous identity. While the ultimate rejection of this uniform would often have to wait until the students left the school and "returned to the blanket," students could enact smaller resistances at the school through school-sanctioned costume parties. These parties allowed for a break from uniform-wearing and opened up an opportunity to come dressed as an 'Indian,' returning the Indigenous body and mind to a place of comfort and joy. The students wearing the costumes enacted a disruption to their assimilation by re-donning the forbidden garments, reclaiming both their body and identity by choosing to dress as an 'Indian.' This research examines the Carlisle Indian School's archival material at Dickinson College to investigate the repression of Indigenous identity through dress and the subsequent reclamation of body and identity enacted by its students.



Lisa Poirier
DePaul University

lpoirier@depaul.edu
17:00 GMT / 13:00 in the US (EST)

"Social Distance Powwow": Beading Through the Pandemic

Contemporary beaded accessories produced or enhanced by indigenous women in North America perform important cultural and relational functions. During the height of the pandemic, powwows were not held, which meant that these regular sites for selling and buying beadwork were suddenly unavailable. However, the indigenous beading community adjusted to this new reality and enabled its members to display and sell their beadwork by moving online to Facebook groups like “Social Distance Powwow” and “The Indigenous Bead Life.” The economic blow of cancelled powwows was softened, and the relational network of creators was maintained. Indigenous beading techniques as well as the images and symbols they employ reflect ancestral connections as well as contemporary individual and collective identities. There is a relational dimension to the creation and sale of these beaded accessories; both the provenance of the items and the identities of the creators are recognized and significant. The material objects that these beadworkers produce or embellish represent and participate in systems of relationship and exchange that challenge non-indigenous discourses by investing marketable items with relational power. My analysis draws from Charles H. Long’s exploration of the ways in which material culture has been the locus for colonized people to assert and maintain their sacred identities, and Catherine Bell’s theorization of the ways in the negotiated participation of dominated groups empowers them in instances of ritualization. Underpinning my work is Dennis Kelley’s investigation of the ways in which indigenous people navigate and shape modernity by inventing new practices that still draw upon traditional modes of being, as well as Jenny Tone-Pah-Hote’s understanding of Kiowa peoples’ use of traditional beadwork as a strategy of identity assertion and sovereignty in times of great challenge.



A. Korkor Ebeheakey
University of Michigan

aliceebe@umich.edu
17:00 GMT / 12:00 in the US (CST)

Establishing Cultural Heritage through Body Modification

Body modification, in general, is seen as a way an individual can communicate beliefs and ideologies without verbally asserting them. The contentment that follows involvement in this practice - among others, as cultural responses - is physically, mentally, and spiritually gratifying. African societies, for centuries, have used this subtle but expressive mode of communication to convey their ideas about aesthetics, social customs, and values. This submission focuses on the art of body marking among the Ga-Dangme of Southern Ghana. It outlines the types of body marks that are done specifically for identification, spiritual purposes, and social status – some of which overlap in purpose and reason – and their cultural connotations. The submission also delves into the divergent perspectives pertaining to a social structure and a society somewhat affected by acculturation. The scrutinization of the marks is done following a theory of purposes as concepts that exhibit cultural heritage and pride.



Caroline Lieffers
MacEwan University

clieffers@gmail.com

19:00 GMT / 13:00 in Alberta (Canada)

“Competent, yet misunderstood”: Objects, Users, and Feeling in the NICU

This presentation uses the case study of Small Beginnings, Inc. to explore dress, the body, and emotion in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). Established by a nurse in 1997 and employing the tagline “Clinicians on a Mission,” Small Beginnings offered a variety of products for neonates, including positioning pillows, feeding tubes, and “bili bonnets” — small hats to protect infants’ eyes during light therapy. But even as it presented itself as an evidence-based medical supply company, Small Beginnings also relied on a discourse that stressed the emotional needs of NICU staff, parents, and infants, anchored in the hope that with the right combination of nurturing care and assistive devices, the child would be discharged healthy from the hospital. The complex environment of the NICU, this presentation argues, muddies the categories that so often guide studies of dress and the body, as well as disability. In the case of fragile infants, the lines between clothing, personal items, and medical technologies, for example, can grow blurry. Similarly, the intersecting care of nurses and parents complicates the category of “user.” While nurses deployed Small Beginnings’ items, many of these tools were prostheses for the bodily operations of the mother-baby dyad. And while they gave hope and comfort to worried caregivers, they were ultimately meant to help the infant. Small Beginnings, in fact, encouraged attention to babies’ individuality. Looking for the faintest signals of distress, caregivers were coached to understand and—with the help of material objects—respond to the subjectivities, expression, and agency of these “competent, yet misunderstood” patients, which would help yield better objective outcomes like weight gain. While thoroughly embedded in a medical model that sought to obviate long-term disability, Small Beginnings also embraced the interplay of user needs, feelings, and technological assistance in the short-term space of the NICU.



Jane Nicholas
University of Waterloo

jane.nicholas@uwaterloo.ca
19:00 GMT / 15:00 in Ontario (Canada)

Material Remains: Speculating on Women's Clothing Left with Infant Bodies in the Nineteenth Century

In 1899, in Toronto, Ontario, an infant's body was discovered on a doorstep. It had been washed and dressed and was covered with two items: a flannelette embroidered with an "E" and a petticoat embroidered with an "K". At the coroner's inquest shortly after the discovery, the items of clothing were noted in the file but no further details or speculations on them were forthcoming by witness, authorities, or jurors. The case was not unusual. Many infants found in the city, and presumed to be victims of infanticide, were discovered with items of women's clothing, especially petticoats and aprons. What can historians make of the brief descriptions of these material remains? This paper explores the possibilities for historians in tuning our attention to the descriptions of infant dress and coverings. These small scraps of evidence can suggest care and comfort for women who abandoned their babies as a strategy for find a home for them. Alternatively, some evidence suggests that the clothing was used to either help women deliver the infant, as many women likely birthed alone and in secret. Finally, the petticoats and aprons – the quotidian clothing of working women – could be shrouds for stillborn children or infants who died during or shortly after birth. This paper seeks to examine the possible emotional meaning behind these items of clothing left with infant bodies.



Blessing Adedokun-Awojodu and Shoshannah Ganz **Memorial University of Newfoundland**

aadedokunawo@mun.ca / sg0721@mun.ca

19:00 GMT / 16:30 in Newfoundland (Canada)

Threading Comfort and Memory as a Sustainable Dress Culture in Newfoundland's Aging Population

This project examines the quiet but powerful ways through which aging women in Newfoundland preserve traditional dress-making and mending practices, creating comfort, purpose, and cultural continuity in a rapidly changing world. Using the autoethnographic tools of Participant Observation, and Reflexive Journalling, the study investigates how fashion practices among older adults, specifically those residing in care homes, become acts of resilience, memory-keeping, and intergenerational engagement. As immigrant fashion practitioners and researchers, we document our own process of navigating and integrating into Newfoundland's distinct sartorial culture. The project includes co-creative activities with elderly women in two long-term care homes, where participants reflect on their sewing histories and collaborate to design simple fashion accessories for youth and children. These creative engagements are indicative of how aging bodies continue to perform agency, transmit knowledge, and take joy in making, despite emerging cultural shifts that often marginalize their craft. Through journals, interviews, and embodied participation, the research asks: 1. What do these quiet, place-based efforts reveal about the social, emotional, and cultural significance of sustainable dress practices in marginalized contexts? 2. In what ways do older adults in Newfoundland embody and transmit knowledge of local dressing and mending traditions? 3. What cultural futures are being imagined through these quiet, ongoing acts of repair and making? In interrogating the lives and hands of these older women, this work contributes to the understanding of dress not only as adornment, but as comfort, care, and connection between the past and the future, threading hope through generational time and material memory.



Grace McCleskey
Texas Christian University

grace.mccleskey@tcu.edu
21:00 GMT / 16:00 in the US (EST)

Fabulousness and Fabulation: Queer Sartorial Rhetorics and Differing Performances of Realness

The seams of a garment stitch together more than the textiles they hold in place. They bind identity, resistance, defiance, and desire into every dart and hem, every last-minute rhinestone and tightly wound corset. This is clear in the queer worlds of drag and ballroom performance, where fashion is a complex assemblage of identity and its contestation. Within these spaces, clothing acts as a technology, both disciplinary and liberatory, through which power, belonging, and resistance are negotiated.

Understanding fashion as a critical and communicative tool allows for a richer engagement with how material culture shapes queer and trans identity formation. Ballroom is well known for its “realness” categories where performers are judged on their ability to embody and perform socially legible identities, often those aligned with dominant cultural norms. In this discursive analysis, I examine three distinct interpretations of realness across different performance spaces: a Femme Queen realness category at New York City’s Latex Ball, a “Best Drag” runway on RuPaul’s Drag Race, and the “Zombie Prom” realness runway on Dragula. My aim is to unravel how textiles serve as rhetorical instruments in the ongoing negotiation of identity and acceptance. Through these examples, I explore how performers use clothing to stage narratives that range from insurgent to assimilative by challenging, reifying, or strategically navigating the norms they reference. The varied performances (or in some cases, altogether rejection) of realness in these competitions offer valuable insights into the rhizomatic relationships between performance, performativity, queerness, and racialization. Fashion and styling, in this context, are vital tools for worldmaking and self-fashioning, serving as sartorial, embodied critiques of the very structures that seek to confine queer expression.



Dylan Joachim
Columbia University

doj2106@tc.columbia.edu
21:00 GMT / 17:00 in the US (EST)

Mask Off: Black Men, Fashion, and the Politics of Visibility in New York City

This paper offers an overview of my 2025 summer fieldwork, where I investigate how Black men between the ages of 21 and 35 in Brooklyn, New York City use fashion as a tool for social performance, communicating their Blackness through their clothing. Drawing on ethnographic methods, I examine how Black men create consumer trends through their fashion decisions as they navigate belonging, aesthetic agency, and expressive audacity in metropolitan life. I argue that through clothing, Black men author narratives of respectability, dignity, and self-definition, both within and against environmental constraints. This work invites audiences to uncover the various social contexts embedded within metropolitan cities as one travels toward or away from visibility, belonging, and power in urban environments. This presentation attends to the conference's call for performing resistance through costuming and cosplay, using anthropologist Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of indexicality to highlight the place-specific ways clothing is designed, worn, and styled by Black men to communicate their Blackness. Moreover, my work highlights the intentional decision-making of Black men to curate aesthetics that influence social and cultural markets by creating trends. Furthermore, my research examines how consumer trends are shaped within an ever-changing social and political landscape. Ultimately, this presentation explores fashion as a tool for cultural authorship and social world-making.



Kelsey Scholes
Macquarie University

kelsey.scholes@hdr.mq.edu.au
21:00 GMT / 8:00 in Australia (NSW)

The Xiao Xianrou Subculture's Challenge to Hegemonic Masculinity

Recent years have witnessed polarising debates concerning appropriate masculinity in the People's Republic of China centred on the xiao xianrou (小鲜肉, little fresh meat) subculture. Xiao xianrou, a term coined by Chinese netizens, often describes young men and male idol celebrities who value maintaining a slim-yet-muscular physique, while simultaneously engaging with beauty and fashion regimes that are traditionally associated with young women. Despite various attempts by the Chinese government to discourage the rise of this fashion movement, it continues to grow in popularity across contemporary Chinese media such as Douyin (TikTok). Through an ethnographic reading of posts produced by young male fashion influencers, I reveal how Douyin becomes a productive site for youth to articulate complex gendered performances via the xiao xianrou subculture which counter and resist the hegemonic gendered ideologies offered by the state. I further interrogate how Douyin provides young Chinese men tools for “queer” resignification, thus opening up opportunities for men to express alternative forms of gender and sexuality. In exploring how individuals use social media to navigate their gender identities through sartorial performance, I argue that Douyin facilitates the production of a subversive fashion subculture in China.



Katarzyna Kociołek
University of Warsaw

kkociolek@uw.edu.pl
8:00 GMT / 9:00 in Poland

Polish festive folk costumes and gender identity

Studied mostly by ethnographers, Polish festive folk costumes have remained marginalised in fashion scholarship. Yet the intricate embroidery and sewing techniques characteristic of these garments clearly demonstrate that the aesthetic qualities associated with elite sartorial practices were equally valued among peasants. In 19th-century Poland, the development of the so-called *chłopomania* (peasant-mania) gave rise to an idealisation of rural life and an aestheticisation of the peasant costume. As a result, festive folk costumes, particularly those from the Lesser Poland (Kraków) region, were frequently depicted in artworks, symbolising rural life as morally pure. After Poland regained independence in 1918, and throughout the communist era, festive folk costumes prominently featured in national celebrations. They were worn by members of music and dance ensembles such as “Mazowsze” and “Śląsk”, to enhance the positive representation of rural communities in line with the dominant ideology of the communist party. The more recent popularity of folk costumes and/or their elements (beads, shawls, hats, shoes) may be seen as linked to the commodification of regional identities, but also as reflective of a renewed interest in Poland’s rural cultural heritage. Unsurprisingly, contemporary Polish fashion designers such as Joanna Klimas, Arkadiusz, and Tomasz Armada have incorporated folk dress elements into their womenswear collections. Based on the seminal studies of folk costume by Petr Bogatyrev (1971), Brzezińska and Tymochowicz (2013), Buckley (1998), and Bazielić (1995), this presentation examines the use of folk costume in selected contemporary fashion designs as a commentary on gender identities.



Amala Vinod and Arindam Das
Alliance University, Bangalore

vamalaPHD23@arts.alliance.edu.in / arindam.das@alliance.edu.in
8:00 GMT / 13:30 in India

Not Just a Post: Sari as Vernacular Creativity, Slow Aesthetic, and Decolonial Agency on Social Media

This paper proposes a close reading of sari-related Instagram content by Indian women through the intersecting lenses of vernacular creativity, slow aesthetics, and decolonial creative agency. Moving beyond hyper-stylized influencer aesthetics or overt feminist resistance, the study focuses on ordinary digital creators- mothers, teachers, working professionals, and homemakers- who utilize the sari not only as attire but also as a mode of expression, self-documentation, and subtle assertion. Vernacular creativity here refers to informal, locally grounded expressions, often articulated through regional music, linguistic markers, and intimate captions. When paired with slow aesthetics- a visual and affective counterpoint to the speed and gloss of influencer culture- these sari performances evoke beauty in ordinary rituals and nostalgia in daily life. These women form intimate publics that celebrate the sari as both practice and archive. Our paper argues that such practices enact a form of decolonial creative agency, where the sari becomes a tool to reclaim cultural forms from both rigid traditionalism and capitalist branding. While some women eventually monetize their content through collaborations with sari-selling stores, the study argues that this professionalization does not mark a departure from their earlier ethos. Instead, it reflects a negotiation with platform capitalism, where creators retain lived experience and intergenerational storytelling at the core of their content. Using a qualitative approach that includes visual and textual analysis of Instagram posts, reels, and associated captions, this paper traces how Indian women transform the sari into a digital archive of self, culture, and belonging. The paper contributes to conversations in feminist media theory, fashion and dress studies, and digital cultural studies by theorizing how sari-draped selfhood becomes a slow, creative practice of cultural meaning-making online.

Alisa Barannikova
Independent Scholar

v.rukah@gmail.com

8:00 GMT / 13:00 in Uzbekistan

Carrying the Past, Wearing the Future: Adras and the Aesthetics of Revival

Since Uzbekistan's independence, there has been an active revival of traditional textile techniques such as ikat (adras) and velvet ikat (bakhmal). Suppressed and marginalized during the Soviet era, these techniques are currently experiencing a resurgence, driven by the personal commitment of hereditary artisans and contemporary promoters of traditional crafts. Today, adras carries a range of symbolic meanings. For some, it remains a relic of the past or a decorative object catering to tourist aesthetics. For others, it is a vital part of cultural heritage and national identity — a medium through which the traumas of colonial history are reinterpreted, a form of embodied comfort, and a source of symbolic grounding in a rapidly changing world. This paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork, including interviews with artisans, designers, and wearers of adras in contemporary Uzbekistan. I examine how this fabric — once associated with backwardness or provincial taste — is being recontextualized both in the glossy sphere of local fashion and in everyday life. For many Uzbeks, especially in the diaspora, adras serves as a means of “placing” the body within a familiar and supportive visual environment. Through the lens of postcolonial theory, I interpret the contemporary use of adras as a form of quiet resistance — not through overt political protest, but through a deliberate return to the self, to the body, and to the sensorial pleasures of color, rhythm, and fabric. In this sense, adras may be seen as a vehicle of everyday hope, allowing one to wear memory and belonging literally.

Marta Bianco

University of Naples (IT) "L'Orientale"

m.bianco2@unior.it

8:00 GMT / 9:00 in Italy

(Re)Interpreting Fashion: Tibetan Plateau between Sustainability, Tradition and Innovation

In contrast to the hyper-accelerated dynamics of fast fashion and beyond the capitalist sphere, fashion on the Tibetan Plateau constitute an alternative paradigm radically rooted in sustainability (Worth 2023; Alevizou & Henninger et al. 2024), awareness and ethical production throughout the supply chain. This analysis of sartorial enterprises and independent brands demonstrates how Tibetan textile traditions are (re)interpreted through distinctive, original and localized production models that are environmentally respectful and culturally embedded. Freed from consumerist imperatives, fashion emerges as a space of ecological experimentation, enabling “earth logic” approaches (Fletcher & Tham, 2019), capable of generating new forms of collective identity and contributing to a reconfiguration of the relationships among humans, materials and landscapes. Adopting a qualitative and transdisciplinary approach, this study examines how Tibetan fashion embodies the principles of slow fashion (Fletcher 2007), proposing models based on a care economy, wherein dressing is redefined as an act of joy, belonging and self-affirmation. In this perspective, clothing is no longer reduced to merchandise but becomes identity expression and relationship with nature. Furthermore, dress is tailored on the body of nomadic communities, representing hope and the Buddhist principle of impermanence (Warner 2022), along with the needs of shared life, respect for natural resources and cultural continuity. Fashion initiatives and community-based practices on the Tibetan Plateau foreground the valorization of local raw materials (yak wool, cotton, etc.), slowness as production method and the direct involvement and training of artisans in every stage of the process. The Tibetan case thus highlights how fashion can be simultaneously creative, sustainable, intergenerational, a vehicle of cultural revival and a quest for identity, suggesting new alliances between tradition and innovation outside the logics of global capitalism.



ESSENTIALS AW Basic Collection
© copyright Nerhi Studio

Day 2 -- Group 6



Galina Ignatenko
Aarhus University

galinaignatenko@cc.au.dk
10:00 GMT / 11:00 in Denmark

Embroidery on clothes as an act of Care, Memory, and Quiet Resistance

This paper explores embroidery as a practice of care, self-repair, and affective connection in contemporary craft communities. Drawing on new materialism (Barad 2007; Bennett 2010) and affect theory (Ahmed 2004; Massumi 2002), this work demonstrates how stitching on clothes — through their texture, repetition, and slowness—mediate emotional bonds and provide comfort, particularly for women who use embroidery as a means of self-expression and storytelling. Based on twenty semi-structured interviews conducted in Russia in 2022 with members of a local (online and offline) embroidery school, along with a close analysis of their stitched pieces, I trace how embroidery becomes a site of intimacy, memory work, and embodied reflection. The study argues that its tactility constitutes an affective language for articulating vulnerability and resilience. Findings indicate that the repetitive motion of sewing cultivates a meditative tempo many participants describe as “self-therapy.” Chosen motifs translate private memories into wearable narratives— childhood emblems, symbols of love or care, shared inside jokes, and pacifist symbols or stitches of rage voiced only in cloth. The act of stitching may carry political resonance, as it can serve as an everyday gesture of resistance, healing, and meaning-making in times of social uncertainty. By examining both the material process and the emotional narratives embedded in these embroideries, the paper argues that textile craft is a space where care and joy emerge not despite pain and fragmentation but through them. In doing so, it contributes to wider conversations about how textiles, craft, and embodied making cultivate comfort, connection, and hope in contemporary life.



Arathi Anil
University of Exeter

arathianil.engtr@gmail.com
10:00 GMT / 15:30 in India

Sequins, Silhouettes, and the Self: Reimagining Comfort and Joy through Dress and the Body in Contemporary Bollywood Cinema

This paper investigates how contemporary Bollywood cinema constructs narratives of bodily agency, comfort, and aspirational joy through stylized costuming and embodied performance. Amid rising global precarity and gendered surveillance, Bollywood's opulent dress cultures operate not merely as aesthetics of spectacle but as affective strategies of resistance and socio-cultural negotiation. Drawing on films such as *Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani* (2023), *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022), and *Veere Di Wedding* (2018), the study explores how sartorial excess and bodily display articulate both empowerment and performative defiance. Framed through Hall's (1997) encoding/decoding model and postcolonial feminist theories of embodiment (Ahmed, 2004; Menon, 2012), the paper argues that dress in Bollywood constitutes a critical grammar for staging gendered affect, queer visibility, and embodied dignity. For instance, Rani's vivid drapery challenges masculine respectability politics through flamboyant visual pleasure, while Gangubai's structured white ensembles operate as a politics of purity reclaimed through sexual agency. The Bollywood body becomes a canvas where pleasure and politics are stitched together—where dress signifies not only desire, but survival and transformation. Through this cultural studies lens, the paper situates Bollywood costume design as an affective archive of "hopeful bodies" (Ahmed, 2010)—a source of collective identification and comfort amidst dominant regimes of conformity. Participatory viewership, fashion influence, and fan reproduction further underscore how dress mediates the joy of being seen and adorned on one's own terms. In an era of global crisis, this cinematic articulation of body and dress invites us to reimagine visibility as a mode of resistance, and adornment as an act of joy. ——— References (APA 7th): Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Routledge. Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Duke University Press. Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage. Menon, R. (2012). *Seeing like a feminist*. Zubaan.



Debasree Sarkar

Diamond Harbour Women's University

debasree.his@icloud.com

10:00 GMT / 15:30 in India

Defying Conventions and Desired Dressing in The Swadeshi Atmosphere: The Self-Fashioning of the Bengali Bhadramahila

With the introduction of colonial puritanism in Bengal around the late eighteenth century onwards, the female body became a major site of contention among various competing ideologies. The discourse around personal shame or *lajja*, which came with Victorian moralities dispersed through Western education, clashed with indigenous modes of dressing practices and the traditional notions of modesty, and out of this cultural clash, a new style of dressing emerged that helped in the making of the concept of the Bengali *bhadramahila* (gentlewoman). The process of 'modernization' was mitigated and shaped by the gradual change in female education and the subsequent presence of women in the 'public' space infested primarily by men and lower-class and caste women and foreigners. With the rise of the *swadeshi* movement and Gandhi's promotion of *khadi* as the ethical choice of nationalist clothing, women's attire again came under moral scrutiny where decency alone was no longer enough. As women were often considered the embodiment of the nation's honour, their cloth had to be modern yet national. Thus, there were various attempts to dress the 'self' in various roles expected of women in this period of transition: sometimes the role of a decent, 'modernized' gentlewoman; sometimes the role of a traditional yet educated housewife, whom Dipesh Chakrabarty would describe as *grihalakshmi*; and sometimes the embodiment of ideal Indian womanhood, who would lead the way to a new independent India by her moral supremacy. But women's dressing did not follow mechanically the dictates of the changing notions of nationalist modesty. Through looking at their autobiographical writings, this paper will discuss how they interacted with the contemporary notions regarding appropriate dressing in their own way and how the joy and desire of self-fashioning generated new fashion statements, enabling Bengali women to present themselves with unapologetic resplendence and style.



Adaku Agnes Ubelejit-Nte
University of Port Harcourt

adaku.nwauzor@uniport.edu.ng
12:00 GMT / 13:00 in Nigeria

Aging, Appearance Politics and Cosmetics: Unbounding the Social Limit

Old age is desirable, but youthfulness has mostly been equated with beauty and status hence, is pursued in response to ageist and sexist perceptions that marginalize aging bodies. Appearance politics are shaped by neoliberal and patriarchal forces that perceive cosmetics not just for aesthetics, but as instruments to transcend the limits imposed by dominant ageist narratives. These have received little attention in comparison to the extensively studied perceptions of the body, normative beauty ideals and cosmetics. By drawing on surveys with women, this paper critically examines the intersections of aging, appearance politics, and cosmetic practices, with a focus on how women contest socially constructed boundaries of age and beauty. It frames how aging bodies challenge the fixed categories of youthful beauty by engaging in aesthetic practices that defy chronological expectations. The paper aims to highlight how older women use makeup and skincare to challenge invisibility, resist age-based limits and stereotypes, identity, and blur the boundaries of ageist appearance norms. The study employs the Dramaturgical and Intersectionality frameworks to describe how normative ideals that stigmatize aging, and cosmetic practices are deeply shaped by intersecting social realities that predispose older women to manage their appearance and perform youthfulness. Through mixed methods, the paper argues that the use of cosmetics by aging individuals represents a complex negotiation between self-expression, social acceptance, and the pursuit of agency in an appearance-obsessed society. The paper highlights the ambivalence of cosmetic culture: while it can reinscribe oppressive norms, it also holds the potential for subversion and the reimagining of aging beyond decline. By unpacking these tensions, the study contributes to broader conversations on embodiment, identity, and the politics of visibility in late modernity.



Hemasoundari Rajadurai

English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad

r.hemasoundari@gmail.com

12:00 GMT / 17:30 in India

The Politics of Materiality: The Body, Cosmetics and Sexuality in Early Indian Erotic Literature

Contemporary studies in sexuality have increasingly focused on social construction of identities and categories, emphasising the influence of gender, power and political-economic dimensions. While studies in Indian erotic literature do shed light on gender roles, literary motifs and artistic appreciation of erotic literature, they under examine the role of material culture, mainly cosmetics, in the process. Instead, cosmetics have been studied as a subject of everyday life, detached from the innate connection it shares with sexuality. In ancient Arab societies, for instance, the use of perfumes is intricately tied to the aspect of eroticism, also to be noticed in Rabbinic texts that deal with women's use of cosmetics in ancient Judaism. Such academic scholarship is yet to develop on India, possessing a rich erotic literary tradition where application of pastes with designs on bodies of both men and women served as acts of sexuality and tools of seduction. This paper addresses these gaps by examining the neglected relation between sexuality and material culture of cosmetics, specifically focusing on body pastes such as sandalwood, musk and camphor and their designs in the early Indian literary traditions of Sanskrit and Tamil. By employing an interdisciplinary conceptual framework grounded in material culture studies and comparative analysis, this paper questions: What functions did cosmetics serve in erotic contexts in Early Indian Literature? What role did they play in construction of gender roles and sexuality? Through a vast corpus of early erotic and love poetry in Sanskrit and Tamil, this paper finds gendered and regional variations in application of the same pastes and designs between these literary traditions situated in acts of sexuality, where the very act of application became a tool of seduction. For instance, sandalwood paste on female bodies was eroticised in Sanskrit poetry while application of the same paste on male bodies by females became an act of seduction in Tamil poetry. This paper contributes to the field of comparative literature by bridging the gap in scholarship between sexuality and material culture of cosmetics. It demonstrates that cosmetics' usage showed considerable change across ancient India that was reflected directly in erotic literature, for it played an important role in sexuality. Besides its changes being reflected in literatures, it also played a significant role in the power relations of everyday life which the work attempts to critically look at and disclose. By situating cosmetics within the broader context of Indian erotic literature, these findings serve implications to fields of literature, gender and cultural studies, offering a deeper understanding of how material culture shapes and reflects cultural attitudes towards gender and sexuality.



Ishan Tripathi
Independent Scholar

ishantripathi33@gmail.com
12:00 GMT / 17:30 in India

Deodorising the Domestic: Smell, Dress, and the Politics of Bodily Comfort in Hindi Cinema

What does it mean to feel “at home” in one’s body? Moreover, whose bodies are allowed to be sites of comfort in cinema? This paper examines how Hindi cinema constructs comfort, joy, and disgust through the interplay of dress, bodily odour, and olfactory regulation, particularly in domestic settings. Focusing on films such as *English Vinglish* (2012), *Piku* (2015), and *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), I examine how the sense of smell, suggested through sweat-stained saris, bathroom cleaning scenes, perfume rituals, or the absence of deodorant, becomes a powerful sensory register of class, caste, and gender. Dress in these films functions as both a material and symbolic container of smell: the crisp cotton kurta that signals control and cleanliness; the stained undershirt that marks labouring masculinity; the sari wet with toilet water or cooking odor that signifies lower-class or servile femininity. Joy and comfort, meanwhile, are often shown to emerge only once the smelling body is disciplined, deodorized, or distanced. Using the lens of olfactory aesthetics, caste studies, and affective labor, this paper argues that Hindi cinema’s depictions of dress and the body reproduce a caste-based sensory hierarchy: certain bodies are allowed to emanate warmth, care, or perfume, while others are persistently coded as excessive or polluting. Ultimately, the paper asks: what are the affective and social costs of comfort? And how do bodies wrapped in certain fabrics, emitting certain scents, become either vehicles for joy or sources of unease?

Dr Kadian A. Gosler
Independent Scholar

gosler.kadian@gmail.com
14:00 GMT / 14:00 in the UK

Soft Monuments: 3D-Printed Lingerie as Dialogic Design, Emotional Memory, and Intimate Futurism

This practice-based research explores how digital craft can materialise emotional memory, positioning 3D-printed lingerie as wearable archives of personal and cultural legacy. Departing from techno-utopian and sustainability-centred fashion futurisms, this project proposes intimate futurism—a speculative, emotionally grounded framework that turns inward to the body, kinship, and memory as sites of hope and reimagination. Centred on four sculptural lingerie pieces designed in response to my mother’s personality, the work merges Baroque ornamentation with Caribbean aesthetics. Vibrant TPU and PLA filaments translate affective traits—sensuality, sisterhood, playfulness, and creativity—into tactile forms. Each garment resists the erotic or functional expectations of commercial lingerie, instead drawing on Afro-Caribbean speculative design to reframe wearables as ancestral technologies. 3D printing becomes a method of preserving diasporic memory, where layered lines recall Jamaican lace-bark and crochet craftwork. Grounded in experience-centred design and Deweyan pragmatism, the project treats designing as a form of embodied inquiry, guided by emotional and material engagement (Brinck & Reddy, 2019). It evolves into dialogic design research (Wright & McCarthy, 2010), culminating in a reflective, recorded interview with my mother. Her responses revealed alignments and resistances between designer intention and wearer interpretation, reframing the garments as “spirit interfaces”—intimate objects that mediate intergenerational dialogue. The resulting artefacts function as soft monuments: ephemeral yet enduring testaments to personal history, joy, and survival. By embedding Caribbean material sensibilities within digital fabrication, the project proposes a decolonial approach to wearable technology—where comfort and joy emerge from co-authored narratives of lived experience. Intimate futurism, here, becomes a method for designing speculative futures not on distant horizons, but within the body’s most intimate contours.

Jenny Frances Mearns
The Salisbury Museum

jennyjenfrances@gmail.com
14:00 GMT / 14:00 in the UK

‘She was now more than nine feet high’ The role of self-made clothing in navigating the Wonderland of identity

Clothing serves as a layer of protection against outside influences; providing warmth in cold temperatures, signifying identity through uniforms, indicating belonging to various groups, and conveying information about personality and style. Yet, clothing also provides support of the emotive kind, imbuing strength and confidence when we need to feel brave, happiness and hope in uncertain situations. This research will explore the role of various pieces of my own self-made clothing, and how through repeated wearing’s they have been a source of strength, affirmation of identity, and confidence.

Furthermore, the act of creating of these garments provided a source of constancy and stability during wildly unstable times. Each handknitted row of a chartreuse jumper weaving together my sense of self, a hopeful reminder that like Alice finding her way through Wonderland, I too could navigate uncertain times and emerge stronger, wiser. This research will discuss my own mental health and experiences of negative body image, anxiety and depression, and how through the creation and embodied act of wear of these self-made garments, I found hope, resilience and a sense of contentment.



Jalen Thompson
SUNY Oneonta

jalen.thomp@gmail.com
14:00 GMT / 9:00 in the US (EST)

Nailography: A Performance Film

The cultural practice of wearing acrylic nails has holds great significance in Black, Brown, and other communities of color. Even if you haven't noticed it yet, we're living in a nail art renaissance with the mainstream prominence of figures like Sha' Carri Richardson and Cynthia Erivo. These figures demonstrate how the quotidian nature of wearing nails showcases expressions of queer embodiment. As sculptures crafted by nail technicians and their clients, acrylic nails narrate a unique story about femme embodiment and critique the boundaries of labor and leisure. Taking this cultural practice as a form of inquiry, Nailography: A Performance Film is an ethnography about my journey as a Black queer femme who navigates the intricacies of identity wearing acrylic nails. This film documents my continued articulation of my queerness in different social spaces: my family, the academy, and in the everyday. Each one of these spaces requires me to think about how I show up and how I am read. As the film will show, each nail design animates a different form of embodiment that highlights the Black queer femme survival tactic of "thriving," what I call the freedom to express in the face of homophobia, transphobia, and white supremacy.



Ibtisam Ahmed

Independent Scholar/Artist

ibtisam1705@gmail.com

16:00 GMT / 16:00 in the UK

Reclaiming and Reimagining History Through Performance Costume

Many aspects of marginalised histories have been intentionally erased over time, including my own lineage as a queer person of colour from a country that was formerly a British colony. The erasure of diverse stories and experiences can be difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct with any real accuracy. However, the ownership of those histories can be creatively reclaimed and the impact creatively reimagined through costume. As a performer with the queer brown House of Spice collective, my work consists of championing my identity and heritage in every aspect of my stagecraft. This includes costuming. In this practical presentation, I use the clothes I wear on stage to reflect on the joys of reconnecting with fractured pasts - using local fabrics, hand-sewing techniques, design motifs, and the histories of clothing as tools of liberation.



Kim Renfrew

University of the West of England

Kim2.Renfrew@live.uwe.ac.uk

16:00 GMT / 16:00 in the UK

The (queer) joy of lesbian dress

That lesbian clothing is styled for comfort, with baggy clothes, sensible shoes and practical haircuts, is well-documented. But if, as Holliday¹ asserts, “comfort is an easy, unthinking state [meaning] social and personal atrophy,” is there something to lesbian/queer women’s dress that can propel us through uncertain times? My paper explores how clothes, with their power to elicit pleasure, can be a wellspring of queer joy from which flow resistance; recognition; and communal delight. Using case studies from oral history interviews gathered for my PhD, I explore how queer joy and queer temporality weave through lesbian dress practice to create a mode of enquiry and a strategy of resistance, and the potential to transform. Firstly, I examine how one interviewee’s appropriation of vintage t-shirts meant for straight, white heteronormative men gleefully subverts misogyny and homophobia - even the institution of heterosexuality itself. Accentuating and celebrating her large, lesbian body, this dress practice becomes “a backward glance that enacts a future vision”². I also explore another interviewee’s colourful skirts, which undercut the lesbian-feminist construction of skirts as restrictive garments, reconceiving them as instruments of freedom. The skirts contrast with the drab clothing that characterised her Christian upbringing’s prescriptive heterosexuality and centre this interviewee as the hero of her own queer picaresque. In foregrounding the joyful potential that lesbian dress practice elicits, I demonstrate that queer joy, enacted through style and clothing, becomes “a realization that mere survival is not the benchmark of existence”³. 1. Holliday, R. (1999) The Comfort of Identity. *Sexualities*. 2 (4):475–491. 2. Mitchell, R.P. (2022) The Art of Ridicule: Black Queer Joy in the Face of the Fatigues. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. 35 (9):943–959. 3. Muñoz, J.E. (2009) ‘Cruising utopia: the then and there of queer futurity’. *Sexual cultures*. New York: NY University Press.



Perrin Marie
Independent Scholar/Artist

theperrinmarie@gmail.com
16:00 GMT / 11:00 in the US (EST)

HOOPLA

HOOPLA is a wearable art project by internationally published artist Perrin Marie that reclaims the hoop skirt—not as a dusty relic of repression, but as a radical tool of survival and space-taking. Often misunderstood as symbols of female confinement, hoop skirts (crinolines and cage crinolines) were actually revolutionary. Introduced in 1856 by R.C. Millet, the steel-cage hoop skirt liberated women from layers of heavy horsehair petticoats that caused countless fatal accidents—autopsy reports of the era literally list “death by crinoline” as cause. Millet’s lightweight design didn’t just save lives; it gave women unprecedented room to move, breathe, and assert physical presence. In a time when women had no vote and little voice, entering a room in a fourteen-foot-wide skirt was a quiet act of defiance—a wearable declaration: I am here, I take up space, and you will move around me. HOOPLA channels this historical energy into the present, transforming recycled materials into bold, noisy hoop skirts and accessories that chime, clink, and refuse to be ignored. In a world where women’s and marginalized identities’ rights are under siege—from Taliban bans on girls’ education to the rising tides of misogyny—HOOPLA asks: what does it mean today to physically, unapologetically take up space and get loud about it? Through wearable art, participatory workshops, and community installations, HOOPLA invites self-identifying women, non-binary individuals, and others across the gender spectrum to do just that: to take up space, make noise, and stir joyful, collective resistance. When they say “hush,” we HOOPLA.





Tarisa Little
Brown University

tarisa.little@gmail.com
16:00 GMT / 11:00 in the US (EST)

Embodied Refusals: Dress, Discipline, and Indigenous Resistance in Wyandot Schools

In the midst of global upheaval and enduring colonial violence, the Wyandot of Anderdon Nation's 19th-century day school offers a powerful example of how dress and the body can serve as quiet acts of resistance, comfort, and joy. From 1846 to 1886, the Wyandot operated their own day school on the Anderdon Reserve in what is now Ontario, preserving control over curriculum, language, and daily life. Unlike state- or church-run institutions that sought to erase Indigenous identities through enforced dress codes and bodily discipline, the Anderdon day school allowed children to remain at home, wear their traditional clothing, and engage with kin-based practices that honored the body as a site of cultural transmission. Students likely arrived at school in moccasins and handmade garments, later gathering with their families for seasonal ceremonies, dances, and feasts—bodily expressions of joy and continuity. The school itself was embedded in a broader Wyandot strategy of survivance, where the physical presence of children in the community, dressed in culturally significant ways, affirmed belonging and agency. At a time when Indigenous children elsewhere were being stripped of names, hair, and heritage, the Wyandot of Anderdon insisted on a vision of education rooted in respect for the body, kinship, and tradition. Their story reminds us that even in dark times, the body—clothed in meaning—can be a source of hope.



Join us next time!
November 7-8, 2026